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Tip of the Week

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Electric fireplaces are a great way to create warmth and coziness where conventional fireplaces are warranted. Their relaxing atmosphere can be achieved by just plugging them in and to everyone's doubt they are surprisingly real looking as well as being a great source of supplementary heat. Easy to operate and no installation costs makes an electric fireplace an ideal choice this winter.

For a full line of electric fireplaces and other products go to Rona.ca

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Furnace inspection now can save you money later

BY ROD URQUHART

Do you want to be caught in the cold this coming winter? In your own house, no less?

It could happen, says Mike Campagnolo of Summers and Smith Cooling and Heating Ltd., if you don't get your furnace checked.

"Tons of people (have their furnace die) over the weekend when the temperatures drop below freezing," Mr. Campagnolo says. "People get stranded. They can make a rash decision.

"They can pay hefty overtime or pay more for their parts. It's important to get the furnace looked at before they get into problems," he stresses.

Mr. Campagnolo says homeowners should be proactive when it comes to basic furnace maintenance—such as changing the air regularly, ensuring the outside vents are not obstructed and covering the air conditioner. He also suggests turning off the power to the air conditioner.

"It's a waste of power," he says. "Animals love a warm compressor and can make a nest and they make a mess over the winter."

If you're planning a winter vacation, Mr. Campagnolo suggests having a family member or neighbour come in to check on the furnace or taking advantage of the feature on some newer models that will alert homeowners or dealers if there's a problem with the unit.

Chris Cumming of Cumming Home Heating & Cooling says annual furnace checks will ensure your furnace is running efficiently—a dirty blower wheel, for example, will mean your furnace is using more electricity than necessary. He adds that inspections are often a requirement of manufacturer warranties.

Steve Desjardins of T. H. Oliver Heating & Cooling says while many companies, including his, offer 24-hour, on-call servicing for no-heat emergencies, an early-season inspection could prevent you requiring such a service in the middle of the winter.

Nancy McKerghan of Canco Climatecare Heating and Air Conditioning says regular maintenance will save your money in the long run.

"Your furnace should be serviced yearly to ensure safe operation, peak efficiency and also it adds to the life of your furnace," she says. "And you can avoid extensive repairs."

Ms McKerghan also notes the Ontario Power Authority is currently offering a \$250 rebate to homeowners who replace older model furnaces with more efficient electronic commutated motor (ECM) units.

Such an upgrade could save you \$200 to \$400 a year or more on your hydro bill, depending on current usage, she says.

Ms McKerghan suggests homeowners facing hefty repair bills consider the benefits of a new furnace—more efficient use of energy, smaller footprint, peace of mind—before fixing a furnace that is more than 15 years old.

When purchasing a new furnace, you should insist on a written quote and a heat loss calculation so "the capacity of the furnace can match the house," she adds.

To ensure a warm house this winter, the wise choice is to get your furnace checked.



Protect your home this fall and winter

If you're like most Canadians, your home is probably your most important investment. The best way to protect that investment is by taking a few minutes each month to inspect your home and carry out a regular schedule of maintenance and repairs. With a little simple seasonal maintenance, you can prolong the life of your home, and put a stop to some of the most common—and costly—problems, before they occur.

To prepare your home for the fall and winter clean leaves, nests and other obstructions from your eaves-troughs, roof and chimney and test the downspouts to ensure there is adequate drainage away from your home.

Make sure the ground around your home slopes away from the foundation. This will help keep water and melting snow away from your house and out of your basement. Also, make sure all your windows and skylights close tightly and test your plumbing shut-off valves to be sure they're working properly.

Clean or replace your furnace air filters every month and have your furnace serviced by a qualified technician

every two years if you use gas or once a year if you have an oil furnace.

During the winter months, monitor your home for condensation on the windows or other signs of excessive moisture. Too much moisture indoors can cause damage over time and may even pose a health risk to you and your family.

Check your attic regularly for frost accumulation, and inspect your roof for ice dams or icicles. If you find excessive frost inside or icicles and ice dams on the roof surface, it may indicate air leaks or improper ventilation.

Through regular home maintenance, you can often prevent larger and more costly home repair expenses in the future. It's also a good idea to put aside a little in your budget each month for an "emergency fund" for your home. An emergency fund allows you to handle any repairs or maintenance issues that might come up, without sacrificing your financial well-being or peace of mind.

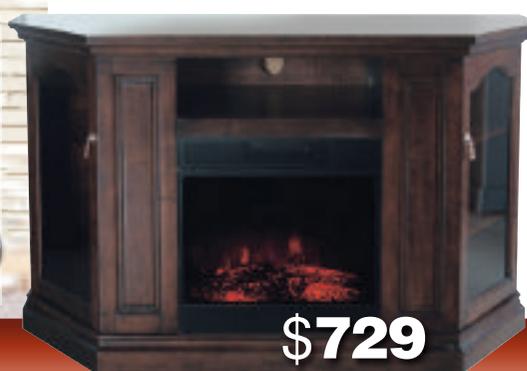
Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

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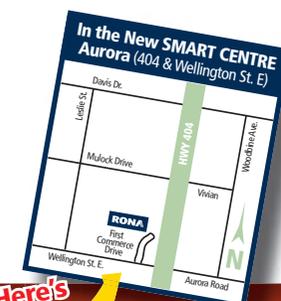
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